1998

Oral History Interview: Raymond Dawson

Raymond Dawson

0580

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Todd R. Dawson
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4-26-98
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RAY DAWSON BY: TODD DAWSON

Mr. Dawson discusses in detail, the art of shooting marbles growing up and how children today doesn't do those kinds of childhood games. He talks about growing up in a lower middle-class home, his family, working a paper route, WWII, the Merchant Marines, unions, and strikes. He concludes the interview by talking about the positions he held during his employment at Inco Alloys (The Nickel Plant) in Huntington, WV.

Oral History of Appalachia

Subject: Life Histories

An Oral Interview With: Mr. Raymond Dawson

Conducted By: Todd Dawson

Date of Interview: 4-26-98

Transcriptionist: Todd Dawson

0580

Raymond Dawson is a native of Huntington, West Virginia. He has lived here all of his life except for his time in the military. He has two children, a boy and a girl one of which is deceased. He wanted to stay away from some subjects like his wife who just passed away in January and the death of his daughter. Those were memories he didn't want to bring up. We talked mostly about him growing up in Huntington. He was a tremendous athlete and loves to recall memories of playing ball. He was also very active in the union at International Nickel (INCO). He and most people from the region call it the nickel plant. The following tells about growing up in a lower middle class family in Huntington. Any reader will be able to see the pride he has in his hometown.

TD: It's Sunday April 26th at 7:35 and we're at the residence of Raymond H. Dawson. This is for the Oral History, for the Sociology department. Raymond could you tell me about when you were first born or you earliest memories of you childhood?

RD: Oh, that's hard to say.

TD: What's like the first thing you remember?

RD: Oh my goodness, I really don't know Todd.

TD: Like your earliest memories of childhood?

RD: You're talking about 70 ~~sum~~ some years ago.

TD: How old are you now?

RD: 77

TD: When's your birthday?

RD: October the 20th, 1920.

TD: 1920

TD: What part of Huntington did you grow up in?

RD: Right down there where the Henderson Center is. That's where I was born, where the Henderson Center is now, on Virginia Avenue.

TD: What part of Huntington, or what part of Marshall University was in existence then? What did they have?

RD: They didn't have, it wasn't very big then.

TD: Just about like Old Main?

RD: Yeah, and they had their gym right on the campus over there. Marshall practiced right on the campus in a gym. That's where I first seen Rivlin.

TD: In Gulikson Hall? Was that Gulikson Hall?

RD: No, Gulikson Hall wasn't there.

TD: So how far did it go?

RD: Right on the campus over on fifth avenue there, on Virginia avenue, I mean College avenue they called it.

TD: How far east did the campus go?

RD: About seventeenth street.

TD: And now it goes all the way to 20th street right?

RD: All the way to 20th street yeah.

RD: You know one thing I noticed now, Todd, is kids don't shoot marbles like we used to.

TD: That was a big deal back then?

RD: Why, that's all they done, shoot marbles. I never see kids shoot marbles anymore.

TD: How old were you when you did that?

RD: Oh, about ten or twelve years old.

TD: Were the marbles very expensive?

RD: No, no no.

RD: They was expensive if you had to buy them, but I won them shooting marbles. Yes sir.

TD: Did you get ever get those ball bearings and use them as marbles?

RD: We called them Steelies, yeah I had them too.

TD: Where did you get those from?

RD: Yøu would just find them. We had aggots. I had a good aggot, yeah.

TD: Did you walk up and down the railroad tracks to find them?

RD: I don't know how I was to come by them steelies but we had them. I never did use them. Some of them had clay marbles, we had them too.

TD: That was a big deal?

RD: Yeah, they used to have the city tournament here for each school and the winner in Huntington would go to Lakewood, New Jersey to play in the nationals. We shot at them clay marbles.

TD: So it was pretty organized?

RD: Oh, yes sir! They advertised or sponsored it.

TD: What kind of things would you win?

RD: Oh, they'd win a bicycle. They played right down in front of the Advertiser. They'd block the street off and they'd put bleachers down there for the finals and the winner would go to Lakewood, New Jersey to play in the- we had two or three boys from here in Huntington win the nationals. Yes sir.

TD: Any of your friends?

RD: Oh yeah, one boy I went to school with.

TD: How old were you when you were doing that?

RD: We was in the sixth grade, elementary school.

TD: So it was a big deal?

RD: I couldn't shoot, Todd I could beat them boys easy but when I'd get nervous my hands would sweat and I couldn't hold on to the marbles. I could beat that one boy that won the nationals. But my hands, you know, in those tournaments would sweat. Oh it was a big deal. There would be big crowds down there and everything.

TD: Would they just have—would they just draw a circle in the dirt?

RD: No, they would put thirteen marbles in there crossed like that (crosses two index fingers) and the first one that got seven won. They'd put them in a cross. Oh there'd be a big crowd, they roped off the Advertiser. I was just thinking about that.

TD: Was that the newspaper?

RD: Yeah, the Advertiser. See they used to have two newspapers. They had morning, evening and on Sunday. There was two papers on Sunday.

TD: Was the Herald Dispatch one of them?

RD: Herald Dispatch was the morning. Advertiser was the evening.

TD: You passed one of those papers right?

RD: Yeah, I passed all three of them.

TD: So you, the paper boy would pass the Herald and the Advertiser morning and evening?

RD: Passed all of them, yes sir.

TD: What do you remember about passing those papers?

RD: I remember getting up at four o'clock in the morning, passing my papers them I would come back, take a little nap and then go to school, yes sir.

TD: How many papers did you pass?

RD: About 200.

TD: What part of Huntington was your route?

RD: Out there above Cabell Huntington Hospital, up on that hill—six dollars a week.

TD: Did you walk it or ride it?

RD: Walked it. Yes sir!! We got our papers out there back of the Imperial bowling alley, in the alley, in the garage. Then walk all the way out there on 18th street. We lived there right close to Lincoln school. Didn't think nothing about it, then go to school.

TD: What time would you get to bed at night?

RD: , I went to bed early to get up at four o'clock in the morning.

TD: How long do you think it would take you to pass 200 papers?

RD: Oh! I'd get back home about six o'clock.

TD: Then would your mom fix you breakfast?

RD: No no no we'd fix something to eat and I had a helper too. You know how much I give him?

TD: How much?

RD: Fifty cents a week.

TD: What did you make?

RD: Six dollars a week and tickled to death to get it. Six dollars then was a lot of money! I'd give mom two dollars of it. Irvin did too.

TD: That's your brother?

RD: Yeah

TD: Do you remember living over there where the Henderson Center is now?

RD: No that were I was born, born at my grandpaw Robinson's house. Yeah they called that Virginia avenue, right there were the Henderson Center is.

TD: Do you remember your grandfather Robinson that much?

RD: No, no I just remember the Dawson's, grandmother and grandfather Dawson but not the Robinson grandfather.

TD: What did your grandfather Robinson do?

RD: He was a grocery man, had a grocery store.

TD: Did he own a grocery store?

RD: Yeah

TD: What about his wife?

RD: She was a house keeper.

TD: What was the old man's name?

RD: Gabe, Gabe Robinson

TD: Were they immigrants from England?

RD: No they came from right here.

TD: Do you know when the Dawson's came over?

RD: I really don't know.

TD: You don't know how far back it went?

RD: Huh uh.

TD: Do you remember anybody ever living outside of West Virginia?

RD: No, all of them was from right here in West Virginia.

TD: Here in Huntington?

RD: Yeah

TD: What about the Dawson's?

RD: Right here in Huntington.

TD: What was your grandmother Robinson's name?

RD: Ida

TD: What did she do?

RD: She was a housekeeper. Yeah

TD: They were from Huntington?

RD: Right here in Huntington.

TD: What about the Dawson's side?

RD: They was from Huntington too.

TD: What was your grandfather Dawson's name?

RD: George, George and Fannie Dawson

TD: What did he do?

RD: He was a carpenter, when he worked.

TD: He didn't work very much?

RD: He didn't work very much.

TD: What was he like?

RD: I liked him all right, he's all right.

TD: Was he pretty good to you?

RD: Yes sir, yes sir.

TD: Did he play sports at all?

RD: No, no. Grandmaw Dawson always had to give you a big hug every time you come to the house. She wasn't no bigger'n a minute though, real small. Dad was like that, he always had to give you a hug. Emily's that same way, you know that? (laughs)

TD: Yeah, she is.

TD: What about, what's your dad's first name?

RD: Ray, just plain old Ray. He never had no middle name.

TD: So where did the Raymond come from?

RD: Well, they named me after dad and they put that Raymond on there. Then your dad was named Raymond, and your Todd Raymond.

TD: When did your dad start playing baseball?

RD: Oh, he started playing when he was real young.

TD: Did he ever tell you stories about it?

RD: Oh my goodness yes.

TD: Tell me some of those stories about when he was playing ball.

RD: He'd go back on Sunday, back in them coal fields, pitch a baseball game—be gone all day. He'd come back and then he'd have twenty dollars. He didn't make but about twenty five dollars a week.

TD: So he could make in one day almost what he would make in a week.

RD: That's right.

TD: Do you remember what parts of West Virginia he would go and play baseball?

RD: They went down in Kentucky the biggest part of the time. I heard him talk about Maysville, Kentucky.

TD: That's about half way between here and Cincinnati.

RD: They'd be gone all day, they would have dinner.

TD: He would get back at night?

RD: Yeah, get back late at night.

TD: How would he get the money.

RD: The manager would give them the money. See they was guaranteed so much money.

TD: They would split up what they took at the gate?

RD: No no, the team that bought them there would tell them there would be a guarantee for their traveling and so much for the pitcher.

TD: So they would make so much money no matter if they won or lost?

RD: Oh yeah it was guaranteed.

TD: So it was pretty organized then.

RD: Sure it was.

TD: So you could say he was a professional baseball player.

RD: He could have made it. He could have played ball professionally. He had to quit school when he was sixteen years old and go to work at the American Car to help is mother and help the family out. Then later on he got that job at the water company.

TD: Did his dad not make enough money?

RD: I don't think his dad would work very good. That's what he told me.

TD: So when he was sixteen—

RD: He had to quit school, he only went to about the fourth grade. He had to quit school, he might have not even been sixteen.

TD: If he was in the fourth grade he'd been about ten.

RD: He wasn't very old when he went to American Car.

TD: Do you think he ever talked to any professional scouts or any thing like that?

RD: They wanted to take him to Cincinnati. A man that used to play with the New York Yankees wanted to take him. Then, Todd they'd take you right down there and if you could make it, they'd sign you right on the—they didn't have minor leagues like they have now. Well they did too but there's no doubt in my mind that he could've played professional baseball.

TD: So that guy was like a scout?

RD: Well, yeah you might say that and he knew dad could pitch. He couldn't leave on account of taking care of his family, taking care of his mother and dad.

TD: Did he talk to you about that?

RD: Oh he told me all about it. There ain't no doubt in my mind that he could've done it. When he could pitch like that and then go off and get twenty dollars on Sunday.

TD: Would he do that every Sunday?

RD: Every Sunday. Every Sunday they'd go somewhere. Down in the coal fields is where the money was see.

TD: Were the teams, were they sponsored by the coal companies?

RD: Coal companies yeah. And the towns would sponsor them. He'd tell me about it and they'd have big days for them. We went to Omar one time on a guarantee and played ball like that ourselves.

TD: Omar?

RD: Omar, West Virginia out back of Logan.

TD: Down in Logan county?

RD: Yeah, they guaranteed us so much money.

TD: So how old were you when you started going and playing baseball with them?

RD: It was after I got out of the American Legion I was about eighteen or nineteen years old.

TD: The American Legion League?

RD: The American Legion was sixteen. You couldn't be seventeen before June the first.

TD: So that's like senior Babe Ruth is right now.

RD: Well yeah, you might say that. You couldn't be seventeen before June the first.

TD: After you got out did you start making money like that?

RD: Playing ball? No no just that one time that guy had that guarantee up there at Omar and we went up. That was before I went into the service. I didn't get a lot out of it. We loved to play baseball, we didn't care about no money or anything.

TD: Was your dad coaching and stuff like that?

RD: Dad managed the ball team. I used to be the bat boy for them. Before I got up big enough to play.

TD: What about your brother?

RD: He never did play. The one next to me no no.

TD: Did any of them play? Any of your bothers?

RD: The one next to me started playing softball. He was afraid of a baseball.

TD: So name your brothers and sisters for me.

RD: Well, the one next to me is Irvin, fifteen months and then Sister and Herbie.

TD: And he is the oldest.

RD: Youngest, I'm the oldest. Herbie's the baby.

TD: Tell me more about when you were playing baseball.

RD: I didn't play a lot of baseball. There wasn't too many teams here in town when I got out of the American Legion. I played a little bit of baseball, then I started playing softball.

TD: Was that before or after you went into the military?

RD: The biggest part was after I come back. I played a little bit before I left.

TD: So you played baseball almost up until you went into the military?

RD: Right, right. Played a little bit after I come out and then started playing softball.

TD: Tell me some about being in the military, about being in World War II.

RD: Well I was in what they call the arm guard. We sailed on merchant ships. The merchant marines was civilians and we manned the guns on the merchant ships. I went to Calcutta then come back and went to the Pacific Islands down to Guam - Taiwan.

TD: When you were in the military did you know anybody in the military that was from West Virginia?

RD: I met one boy, it was Johnny Daulton it was in California. I met him in San Diego, California after the war was over.

TD: Did you know him before?

RD: Yeah, I sure did.

TD: What about when you were in the military and you met someone that was from West Virginia?

RD: I didn't meet too many of them from West Virginia. I met a couple in Gunnery School down in Gulfport, Mississippi.

TD: But when you did that did you kinda feel like you met somebody that you knew?

RD: Oh, yeah yeah! It was a big help to you seeing somebody from home.

TD: Were the other people like that too? Or did they not care?

RD: Oh yeah they was the same way and there was a lot of them that I left here with to go to boot camp I knew but when we left we went our separate ways.

TD: On that ship there were civilians on that ship?

RD: Merchant marines were civilians they weren't in the service at all.

TD: What was their job?

RD: They would run the ship, unload and loaded it. They run the ship actually with the captain and the people down in the engine room. There wasn't no Navy people on there except us.

TD: So the Armed Guard was a branch of the Navy?

RD: It was the Navy, yeah sure. That was quite an experience.

TD: So what all did you do when you came back from the war?

RD: I went right back to the nickel plant. I worked there before I left and my job was there when I come back.

TD: Did they have to save it for you?

RD: Yes, it's the law. See in World War I when them people came back they didn't have their jobs. So they made the law that if you were there when you left it was there when you came back.

TD: When you started at the nickel plant was it union?

RD: No, they organized it when I was there?

TD: When was that?

RD: I went there in 1940 and the union wasn't really organized real good till I come back in 1946 when I come back.

TD: You came back from the war in 1946

RD: January and they had pretty well organized then, where you bid on jobs and everything. If you was the oldest man, you got that job. Before I went in the service, they just tell you where to work at. Where you didn't have any seniority or nothing.

TD: So what you did in the nickel plant was based on how much seniority you had and everything?

RD: Right. I worked in a rolling mill in the nickel plant.

TD: When you went away to the war and you came back, did you keep all of your seniority?

RD: Yeah you kept your seniority, yes sir. Yeah

TD: Was it a big deal when they unionized up there?

RD: It sure was, made all the difference in the world. That was called the Bill of Rights when you went into the service.

TD: What's that about?

RD: Well you had your rights when you come back from the service your job would be there. They called it the Bill of Rights.

TD: So you went into the service in 1940?

RD: No I went into the Navy in '44, in June of '44, come back in '46—two years.

TD: So you worked three years before you went into the Navy.

RD: Worked three years.

TD: And they were just getting the union started?

RD: Just getting it started and I come back they was organized good.

TD: What union was it?

RD: CIO, Steelworkers union.

TD: Do you remember when you were there in the early forties when they first started unionizing?

RD: I sure do.

TD: What was it like?

RD: It was the best thing that ever happened to the working man?

TD: Did they have trouble getting it started?

RD: No not really. You see they passed out cards on whether you wanted to be unionized or not and if they go a majority the company was forced to grant you a union. They signed enough cards.

TD: Was your supervisor or the foreman, where they ever hard on you because—

RD: No not really. No no It was against the law to do that. You couldn't do that. You couldn't discriminate against anybody if they was trying to form a union. There was a law against that.

TD: And everybody new about that?

RD: Sure they knew about it.

TD: So there was nothing they could do.

RD: No they couldn't do nothing once you organized your union.

TD: Did they ever strike up there?

RD: Yeah we had a big strike in 1957. We was out fifteen weeks in 1957.

TD: What was the strike over?

RD: Over wages and they wanted a union shop. We didn't get nothing. We went back to work for the same thing they offered us after thirteen weeks. They wanted a union shop. You know what a union shop is, everybody has to belong to the union, up at the nickel plant you didn't have to belong unless you wanted to.

TD: So the union wanted to make the nickel plant totally union.

RD: Unionized yeah, where everybody had to belong to the union.

TD: Everybody as in everybody hourly?

RD: Hourly, yeah just hourly. Now they got that. After thirty days you've got to belong to the union after you are there thirty days.

TD: So you guys walked out in 1956?

RD: '57, January

TD: Tell me about that. What was that like?

RD: It was rough. It was rough. We didn't have nothing coming in then. If you was out so long they'd pay your utilities for you. Granny worked over to the school as a cook and that helped a lot she'd bring food home from that school.

TD: Which school?

RD: Over at Lincoln elementary.

TD: What school was that then?

RD: It was Lincoln elementary, right there on ninth avenue.

TD: And you went up and walked the picket line?

RD: Oh yeah! I was one of the officers. I was on the, wait a minute and I'll think of it—I was on the committee.

TD: Did you have any say so on whether everybody walked out or not?

RD: Oh no no no, the organizers, the ones that negotiated the contract done that. What they'd do, they got a man that's from international and you'd take a vote on it on whether you would want to strike or not. The whole body had to have a majority of it.

TD: Did it pass by a large majority?

RD: Well, not to much, not too much. Now they got what they call a secret ballot. Then you just had to hold up your hand on whether you wanted to strike or not.

TD: So that took a lot more guts for somebody to do.

RD: Oh yeah yeah yeah. Now they got a secret ballot

TD: So when you guys walked out since there wasn't that many people that wanted to go out there was a lot of scabs?

RD: Seventy five of 'em

TD: Out of how many

RD: Out of about 1800 crossed the picket line.

TD: Did you see them cross the picket line?

RD: I was right there when they done it.

TD: What was that like?

RD: It was hard to take. Somebody going in there and taking your job. If they'd got enough of them we'd all lost our jobs. Hard to take. But they didn't have enough people in there to do anything. Hourly men.

TD: And you had to watch them go through?

RD: Stand there and watch them day in and day out.

TD: Did anybody do anything to them?

RD: No no no, they told us not to bother nobody.

TD: Did they have security guards up there?

RD: They told us just not to—but they had cameras up and if you bothered anybody when you went back to work you would loose your job. They told us not to bother nobody, just to let them go on.

TD: But you remembered them didn't you?

RD: Everyone of them. At one time nobody could go into the plant but then they passed the Taft-Hartley law and the people like your dad, the clerks and people like that. What am I trying to say now? Not hourly people, just the people that worked in the office and things but the couldn't do nothing either.

TD: So what did they go in there for?

RD: They just went in there and sat around was all they done.

TD: So they didn't really benefit.

RD: No no no. Salary people, they went in.

TD: But they had to because they weren't part of the union?

RD: That's right. They had to. The company told them to come on in there. There wasn't much they could do though.

TD: Was that the only strike you guys had?

RD: They had several little ones but they didn't last very long.

TD: What were they over?

RD: It didn't last not time 'til they would get it settled, maybe a week or two.

TD: Would you guys usually get what you wanted?

RD: Nah, no no. Strike didn't help us a bit. Went right back to work for the same thing they offered us.

TD: But you still think the union helped you?

RD: Oh my goodness sakes yes, I hope to tell you. The union got us everything, better pension, more hourly pay, vacation just better working conditions all around.

TD: So you remember what it was like before the union.

RD: Oh yeah, it was terrible, terrible

TD: What was it like then?

RD: Awful, they would just point their finger at you and tell you where to go to work. The boss you stand over you. If you asked to go to the bathroom, he would look at his watch to see how long you was gone. If you wasn't back at a certain time, he'd come a lookin' for you. Awe, it was terrible

TD: A lot of people resented that?

RD: Oh sure, yes sir, wasn't nothing you could do about it if you wanted to work. All in all it was a good place to work, the nickel plant was.

TD: What kind of wages did you work for, do you remember?

RD: I started out in nineteen and forty—sixty cents and hour. Sixty five cents and hour, wasn't even a hundred dollars a month.

TD: But it was good wasn't it?

RD: I hope to tell you it was good, yes sir. At one time if you had a job at the nickel plant you had it made. That was the best place in Huntington to work.

TD: What about when you retired, what did you make then?

RD: I was probably making oh, seven or eight dollars an hour when I left.

TD: Which was good money.

RD: It was good money! Yes sir.

TD: How long did you work there?

RD: Thirty eight years.

TD: Could you have retired earlier?

RD: No you had to be fifty eight then to get a full pension, and I had to wait till I was fifty eight. Now if you've got thirty years you can retire with a full pension regardless of your age. See your dad was only fifty two years old but he had his thirty years in.

TD: So how does the pension work?

RD: You get so much for how many years you've been there. When I left I got about eleven dollars and a half for each year of service and now those boys get about thirty dollars for each year of service.

TD: A month?

RD: A month! About three times more than I got and I been away from there twenty years. I got eleven dollars and a half and they get around thirty dollars now. You can imagine how much that is.

TD: So if you were there for thirty years you would get nine hundred dollars?

RD: Nine hundred yeah, and I only got, you can figure that up, thirty times eleven—three hundred and thirty three dollars. Oh the union has come a long way. I don't think these young boys today realize what the unions has done for them.

Tape Changes Sides

TD: So what about when you guys went back in after the strike? What about the guys that crossed the picket line?

RD: Well, nobody would have anything to do with them. This one man went up to me and asked me he said " how come you don't speak to me?" and his name was Dennison, an older fella and I said Mr. Dennison did you know that if enough of ya'll come in here I could have lost my job, and we could have lost our job? And he said "why I don't care." Boy that just made me—that just flew all over me when that old man—I just come a hair of slapping him. "I don't care he said." And he didn't! He didn't care whether we lost our job or not.

TD: He said that to you when you guys were in the plant?

RD: Yeah after we went back to work and nobody would fool with him. He came right up to me and said " how come you don't talk to me?" and I said Mr. Dennison, did you cross that picket line and did you know that we could have lost our job? He said "why I don't care." That's the very words that man said. His boy brought him in the trunk of an automobile. His boy was a salary man, brought him in in the trunk. (laughs)

TD: Because he was scared?

RD: Yeah, he didn't want nobody to see him. But once you're in there the word was out that you were in there. Somebody would come back out and tell you.

TD: Who would tell you?

RD: Well some of the people that was working in there and we had some people out on our picket line that would spy for the company and tell them everything that was going on, right in the union with us. See then, you didn't have to belong and that's going right against your own brothers when you do that.

TD: You mean like the brothers of the union?

RD: That's right! When you're a member of the union and you go in and tell the company everything that's going on.

TD: Did they ever find out who those guys were?

RD: No but we had a pretty good idea who they was.

TD: What if you guys would have found out who they were when you were out there?

RD: Oh it's hard to tell what'd happened to them.

TD: Do you think any of them would have gotten their hind ends whipped?

RD: I imagined they would've yes sir yeah.

TD: The were liable to have been killed.

RD: That first one that crossed the picket line, they followed him home. They was going to take care of him. A bunch of guys did and they called the state police and the state police come up and stopped it.

TD: Were you up there then?

RD: No no I didn't go up there. The first man to cross the picket line and the state police stopped it. Well, the got a warrant for the guys that went up there. They had a trial down there in Huntington in a little 'ol JP court, I can see it now and the old JP went to sleep when they was talking about it and finally, all them

people down town was in with the company, and the old man they said " what your decision?" and the old man came out of it and said " why I'll just put him under peace bond."—so they wouldn't bother him again. They said "anybody here go his bond?" One guy said "I'll go his bond", he had property and he went his bond.

TD: That was the guy who was going to whip the other one?

RD: One of them, there was several of them and they'd done it too but the state police followed 'em up there. The knew who they was. One of 'em was old Shantyboat they called him—Belville. He was the one they got the warrant for.

TD: Shantyboat? How did he get that name?

RD: Where him to get the name Shantyboat was he was supposed to have killed a man one time on a shantyboat up there in Guyandotte but they never did prove it on him so they named him Shantyboat.

TD: What's a shantyboat?

RD: Oh, that's where they had boats on the river. They was house boats. They live in them. Just like them boats now you know, all of them, but they didn't go anywhere they just stayed there on the dock and they lived in the house boat. A lot of people done that right there in Guyandotte on the Ohio riverside. That's where old Shantyboat got his name. (laughs)

TD: When you were little you moved around a lot?

RD: Every time the rent come due. (laughs) My dad never owned a piece of property. All that time, he worked for forty five years at the water company and never owned a piece of property.

TD: So you guys would rent houses?

RD: Rent them, yeah. He rented a house till the day he died.

TD: So how many times do you think you moved?

RD: Oh, I imagine ten or twelve times. I went to all the schools in the east end.

TD: Was that pretty tough on you all?

RD: It was pretty hard to go to school when you keep changing all the time.

TD: Was it tough to make friends?

RD: Oh, no it wasn't hard. It was just hard when you would get used to one school and then they would take you somewhere else. We moved I know ten or twelve times. We used to live right down here when this street wasn't even paved.

TD: Sixth avenue?

RD: Right here, this road wasn't even paved. Right down there in a big old double house, on the right.

TD: So it was two houses in one?

RD: It was just a big old house. Wasn't even paved, this road wasn't. I wasn't very old then. I can remember it though. I was going to school.

TD: Tell me about when you almost signed a baseball contract.

RD: Well, we was playing softball down here on fifth avenue where the Field House is now and it come out in the papers that old man Midkiff, that lived in this house, was the manager and they needed another catcher.

TD: He played for the Yankees?

RD: Played for the Yankees, played with Babe Ruth. Mom was kinda kin to them Midkiff's. She called him and he said he would take a look at me down there. After we got done playing softball he asked me to warm up one of the pitchers. Can you imagine when you're playing softball then trying to warm up a baseball pitcher? Them guys could throw that ball. Well, after I warmed him up he said "we're going on the road and when we come back I'm going to let you work in a game." Well when they done that they had to pay you but while they was gone that's when me and granny got married. That took care of my organized—I never was big enough though. I could have probably done it then but I knew I wasn't good enough to play major league ball, wasn't big enough.

TD: How old were you then?

RD: I was nineteen—twenty years old.

TD: So you were twenty when you and granny got married?

RD: Twenty years old. December 27th, 1940. I went to work in the nickel plant in October of 1940 and two months later we got married.

TD: How long did you guys date?

RD: Oh, we dated a year or two.

TD: And after you got married you weren't about to go play ball huh?

RD: Oh no no no no, I had already got that job at the nickel plant.

TD: So do you think that you getting a job at the nickel plant had anything to do with being a good ball player?

RD: No no, you mean me getting the job? No no. They hired ball players but I didn't get the job to play ball. I knew the man that did the hiring. He played ball with dad and I'd go down to his house everyday. I think he finally got tired of me coming down there. His name was Lapell. He finally called me to work.

TD: What did you do when you first went in there?

RD: Worked on a straightener, a thing called the meat arc, then later on I worked in the rolling mill with the boys. It was a rolling mill but they had a straightener in there.

TD: What did you make?

RD: Started out at sixty five cents.

TD: I mean what did you make in there? What kind of metal?

RD: Monelle, nickel all kind of alloys

TD: What other things did you do when you were up there?

RD: Well I done all kind of things in the merchant mill there. That's the only department I ever worked in. I was there when they shut it down, when they went to automation. I was the last one to leave there. Then later on I worked on what they call a wire mill, made wire. I worked on all those jobs in the merchant mill though.

TD: So they used to do everything by hand?

RD: Everything with tongs, hard work.

TD: But then you said they started going to automation?

RD: Nobody touched the metal. It's all just automatic, just push the buttons is all they do.

TD: And that did away with a lot of jobs?

RD: Done away with a lot of jobs, sure did.

TD: Was it just luck that you had seniority?

RD: I had enough seniority to stay on one. I just couldn't wait till I was old enough to leave. I didn't care for that. I didn't care for that new place they went to where you just sit there and push them buttons.

TD: What would you have rather done?

RD: I'd rather stayed there on that merchant mill and work them tongs.

TD: Did you see a lot of people get hurt up there?

RD: I've seen people get bad hurt. That machine I started on, I was telling you about, it had killed a few men. They would get tangled up in that machine. That rod it'd go round and round and they would get their clothes tangled up in it, two of them. One I come in there to relieve him. He got killed on the midnight shift and we'd come in at eight o'clock to relieve him. I had took the job that man got killed on. He had on a pair of brand new cover all's and when he got caught, he couldn't jerk away from it. Blew his brains out.

TD: How did it do that?

RD: Well, they couldn't stop it. It would just slow down and he got too close to it. See they would pull it out of the machine on rollers and he just got too close to it.

TD: Did they tell you that you were taking that guys job?

RD: I knew it. I knew it. You could smell death all around there and the superintendent told me I didn't have to work that day, I needed the job. I tried not to let it bother me but it did bother me. I just went ahead and did a day's work. I've seen people get rods run right through them and everything in that old merchant mill—hot rods.

TD: Would it kill them right there?

RD: No no no. It was a dangerous job, you just had to watch what you was doing.

TD: Did you ever get hurt up there?

RD: No no never did. Lucky, you had to be awful careful of what you was doing.

The tape was paused and I asked Raymond about some of the other unions in town.

RD: Well they went on strike and they started bringing scabs in by the carload to take them men's jobs.

TD: Where was this?

RD: Right there on fifth avenue, Standard Ultramarine, and they got an injunction against the company and old Judge Worth said "As long as I'm sitting here on the bench, there's not going to be any blood flowing on fifth avenue." He ruled in favor of the strikers. He told them they couldn't bring no people in there like that. It wasn't long after that till they settled it when they couldn't bring nobody in there to take them men's jobs.

TD: That union was rough?

RD: They were strong, strong union. So were the rail mill's.

TD: What were they like?

RD: The was a strong union. That's the rolling mill down there.

TD: Tell me about that guy that showed up on the picket line down there.

RD: This guy come in there, they went on strike at midnight on Sunday and at seven o'clock Monday morning this guy come in there in a pick up truck. You could see they was on strike. Some big old guy walked up to him and said " what are you doing here?" The guy said " I heard you people was on strike and I come here to get a job." He didn't even get out of the truck. Now that's true that guy told me and pointed the guy out to me, great old big rough looking guy. He didn't even let him get out of the truck, worked on him right there in the cab. (laughs) Oh boy, I tell you. You know a man's desperate when you come in there and try to his job now.

TD: He'll do about anything he can.

RD: That's right, that's right.

TD: Those people are taking their lives in their hands just coming in there and forming the union.

RD: That's right. You know I can remember that strike in '57 there was a lot of comical things that happened boy. This one guy—right there on the other end of the bridge there's a bus stop there, the building. That's where we done the cooking, had a big stove there.

TD: The blue bridge over the Guyandotte?

RD: Yeah, near the end there was a building there about the size of the living room where people would wait on the bus in out of the weather. We had a stove and the cooked in there for the people on the picket line. Some man, there was a big crowd up there that day, pulled up in his car and one of the officers in the union was right beside the building. He couldn't get back out into traffic and some guy, one of the union members told him to back out and there was a car coming and it almost hit that guy. I said "well didn't you see that car coming?" He said "yeah but I just wanted to see the crash." (laughs) Can you imagine that?

TD: They were crazy huh?

RD: Yeah, but I don't think anybody benefits on a strike though but you got to show the company that you mean business.

TD: So you think you guys got a penny on the hour?

RD: Why yeah, one penny. But you never get that money back over a period of years, the money you lost. Then they had another little strike after I come back. It didn't amount to much. The salaried people went out on strike and they broke their union. That was the clerks and inspectors. That was right after I come back. They broke them, the company did. They started going in there. They would give them a notice and if they didn't come to work the didn't have a job. They had to go to work then, cause salary people, they can be replaced awful easy.

TD: What union did the salary people belong to?

RD: It might have been the same union, the steelworkers.

TD: How could they break their union but not your all's?

RD: Well they got enough people to come into work. They just went on like nothing had happened see.

TD: And how come you all didn't walk out then?

RD: Oh they did. They sent everybody home. It didn't last 24 hours. I was running the straightener then and the boss come around and asked me if I needed an inspector for that job. See they had to have clerks. I told him no I didn't need no inspector and he let me go ahead and work. I needed the job, right after I come back. This guy that was helping me, he got mad because I told the boss I didn't need no inspector. He wanted to go home. I said I needed the work and I actually did. It was just after I come back. He wanted to go home. It didn't last no forty eight hours. They settled it. I know a lot of the guys too that went in there. The just acted like nothing happened. One of them Verbage's was one of them.

TD: He crossed the picket line?

RD: Yeah Tom, Shag's brother.